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THE EMERGENCY AID OF 1776

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BY
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Chairman of Polish Committee

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THE EMERGENCY AID OF 1776

Recently I had occasion to go over some books inherited from my father, and, among others, found two of peculiar interest, one entitled, "Life and Correspondence of President Reed," the other, "Life of Esther Reed." Since my family claim a paternal ancestor named Reed, I was moved to glance into these volumes, and my curiosity was rewarded by discovering therein a mine of information concerning what, for the want of a better term, I shall call the Emergency Aid of 1776, or of the American Revolution.

Esther Reed was born in England, where Joseph Reed met her, when reading law at the Inns of Court, London; she was the daughter of an English merchant with American commercial connections, named De Berdt. After a romantic courtship, Mr. Reed and Miss De Berdt were married, and journeyed to Philadelphia, where they subsequently lived. In 1778, Mr. Reed became President of the Executive Council of the State of Pennsylvania, later, Colonel in the American Army, occupying a position on the staff of General Washington and serving as his military secretary, then, Adjutant General of the Continental Army, and, finally, he was elected a member of the Congress of the United States.

The two books to which I refer were written by Joseph Reed's grandson, William B. Reed, who, in the one upon his illustrious grandsire, at page 260, states: "The close of Mrs. Reed's life was marked by some little public interest. In the spring of 1780, at the period of the greatest distress

and suffering, the ladies of Philadelphia united for the purpose of collecting, by voluntary subscriptions, supplies in money and clothing for the army. . . . Mrs. Reed was placed at the head of this voluntary association. . . . On June 20th of that year, Mr. Reed, in a letter to Washington, said: 'The ladies have caught the happy contagion, and in a few days Mrs. Reed will have the honour of writing to you on the subject. It is expected she will have a sum equal to 100,000 pounds, to be laid out according to your Excellency's direction in such a way as may be thought most honorable and gratifying to the brave old soldiers who have borne so great a share of the burden of this war. . . . We have just heard that Mrs. Washington is on the road to this city, so we shall have the benefit of her advice and assistance here, and, if necessary, refer afterwards to your Excellency.' "

It appears that the work of Mrs. Reed's committee was conducted in this city and adjacent districts. In Philadelphia proper, the women collected upwards of \$300,000 (continental currency), which, according to its depreciated value, was worth about \$7,500 in gold. While, today, the latter sum seems insignificant, yet its value in 1780 may be appreciated when we consider that, at about this time, the merchants of Philadelphia and others started a bank with a capital of \$7,900. or, as said by the author of the book before me, only "about 400 specie dollars more than was contributed for mere charity by the ladies of this city."

In a letter to General Washington, on July 4, 1780, Mrs. Reed says that her committee had communicated with "the other states," in "hopes the ladies there will adopt similar plans"; and it appears that, at least, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland satisfactorily responded.

The number of contributors was 1645, and, as stated by the author of the books before me, "All classes of society seem to have united, from Phillis, the colored woman, with her humble 7s 6d, to the Marchioness de Lafayette, who

contributed 100 guineas in specie, and the Countess de Luzerne, who contributed 150 dollars in specie.

The 100-guinea contribution came through General Lafayette, who wrote a most charming letter from army headquarters; in which he said the writer was full of admiration for the endeavors of "the fair ones of Philadelphia," who had "taken the lead" in the war relief work, adding, "I know of one who, heartily wishing for a personal acquaintance with the ladies of America, would feel particularly happy to be admitted among them on the present occasion," meaning, of course, the Marchioness; and he ends his communication thus: "Without presuming to break in upon the rules of your respected association, may I most humbly present myself as her ambassador . . . and solicit in her name that you accept her offering."

A series of letters passed between Mrs. Reed, as Chairman of the Committee, and General Washington, as head of the Army, which enter into most minute details concerning supplies to be furnished by the former. In one of these, Mrs. Reed asks whether the General would rather have 2000 shirts or \$2, "hard cash," for each soldier. In reply Washington took the shirts, saying that "a taste of hard money might be productive of much discontent" in the army, that "a few provident soldiers would probably avail themselves of the advantages which would result from the generous bounty of two hard dollars in specie, but it is equally probable that it will be the means of bringing punishment on a number of others whose propensity to drinking, overcoming all other considerations, too frequently leads them into irregularities and disorder which must be corrected." Then the General goes on to say that "a shirt would render the condition of the soldiery much more comfortable." All of which shows the simple matters with which the Father of our country had to cope, and indicates the simplicity of those days, when each soldier counted as an individual, and not merely as a component part of a great fighting machine, as today.

Mrs. Reed apparently enjoyed the confidence of Washington and was one of his strong supporters. In a letter to her husband, written in 1780, a short time before her death, she intimates some misunderstanding between Mr. Reed and the General; for she states, "I hope you will suspend any decided judgment on the General's conduct until you see him, he may probably explain it to your satisfaction, and remember, my friend, no one is entirely proof against the arts of misrepresentation, or can always act right when those in whom they place confidence make it a point to deceive, or are themselves deceived."

This noble woman seems to have overworked herself in the cause of her country, and, as a result, died on September 18, 1780. The whole community united in a tribute to her memory, the Council and Assembly adjourning to attend her funeral in a body. After this, the lead in war relief work appears to have been taken over by Mrs. Sarah Bache, the daughter of Dr. Franklin, who was assisted by four other members of Mrs. Reed's committee, namely: Henrietta Hillegas, wife of Michael Hillegas, first Treasurer of the United States, who, before her marriage, was Henrietta Bonde, daughter of Samuel Bonde, a well-known merchant of Philadelphia; Anne Francis, wife of Trench Francis, the younger, who, before her marriage, was Anne Willing, a descendant of Edward Shippen, the first Mayor of our City; Mary Clarkson, wife of Matthew Clarkson, later the Mayor of Philadelphia, who, before her marriage, was the daughter of Thomas Bonde; and Susan Blair, who, so far as I can ascertain, was probably the wife of Rev. Samuel Blair, of Germantown, then a Chaplain in the American Army.

Mrs. Bache continued the correspondence with Washington, informing him that she had packed the shirts referred to in the above quoted letters, 2005 in number, and saying that she hoped the soldiers would wear them with as much pleasure as it had given the ladies to make them.

In February, 1780, the General wrote a letter addressed to "Mrs. Francis, Mrs. Hillegas, Mrs. Clarkson, Mrs. Bache

and Mrs. Blair," in which, referring to the death of Mrs. Reed, he said, "The benevolent office which added lustre to the qualities that ornamented your deceased friend could not have descended to more zealous or more deserving successors. The contributions of the association you represent have exceeded what could have been expected, and the spirit that animated the members of it entitles them to an equal place with any who have preceded them on the walk of female patriotism. It embellishes the American character with a new trait, by proving that the love of country is blended with those softer domestic virtues which have always been allowed to be peculiarly your own. . . . The Army ought not to regret their sacrifices or sufferings, when they meet with so flattering a reward as the sympathy of your sex, nor can they fear that their interests will be neglected, while espoused by advocates as powerful as they are amiable."

At the back of the life of Mr. Reed, the author prints various lists of subscribers, and states, "The original of the following subscription papers are in my possession; I am tempted here to insert them, in order to perpetuate the individual munificence of the times."

The first of these accounts shows the city divided into districts, and gives the names of the women at the head of each district, as follows: -

1. Mrs. G. B. Eyre Coates and Mrs. J. B. Smith, for Northern Liberties.
2. Mrs. F. Wade, from Vine to Race Streets.
3. Mrs. Hutchinson Hasenclever, Mrs. Hillegas, Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson, from Race to Arch Streets.
4. Mrs. Thompson Richards, Mrs. J. Blair, and Mrs. T. Smith, Arch to Market Streets.
5. Mrs. R. Bache, T. Francis, Mrs. J. Mitchell, Mrs. J. Caldwell and Mrs. B. McClenachan, Market to Chestnut Streets.
6. Mrs. S. Caldwell, B. Rush, Chestnut to Walnut Streets.
7. Mrs. J. Mease and Mrs. James Wilson, Walnut to Spruce Streets.

8. Mrs. T. McKean, J. Searle, J. Mease, Mrs. Dr. Shippen and Mrs. R. Morris, Spruce to Pine Streets.
9. Mrs. W. Turnbull and J. Benezet, Pine to South Sts.
10. Mrs. Marsh, Ord. Blewer, Knox and Penrose, Southwark.
11. Mrs. H. Hill, Mrs. Hillegas, M. Clarkson, T. Hasenclever and Mrs. R. Bache, Germantown and Bettlehausen.

Subsequent accounts contain lists of individual contributors, and many interesting Philadelphia names are to be found therein, suggesting families that are still prominent and active in the affairs of the community; among others:

Arnold	Crozier	Grubb
Ashmead	Carr	Galloway
	Cox	Griscom
Benezet	Cunningham	
Bright	Craig	Hamilton
Bush	Coleman	Harrison
Boyer	Claypoole	Hopkinson
Barney	Chevalier	Hutchinson
Barry		Holland
Bond	Dickenson	Hall
Bruce	Davis	Hare
Bache	Dick	Hodge
Bartram	Draper	Hoffman
Berry	Dickinson	Hood
Biddle	Delaney	Humphreys
Bringhurst	Davis	Hunt
Barclay	Darrah	
Bell	Drinker	Inglis
Bridges	Dehaas	Irwin
Bowers	Duweas	
Brice		Keen
Bingham	Emlen	Keith
Baker	Evans	
Beck	Fuller	Lewis
Bird	Fisher	Lawrence
Bartholomew	Fithbourn	Lardner
Bryan	Fenton	Leiper
	Fox	Logan
Clymer	Foulke	Lohra
Cramp	Flahavan	Lamar
Canuthers		McCall
Crawford	Gratz	Montgomery

Marten	Peale	Sergeant
Mitchell	Pendleton	Seybert
Morris	Patterson	Saunders
Morgan	Perkins	Snowden
Murray	Peltz	Simms
Middleton	Phillips	Sparhawk
Meredith	Parker	Stewart
McKean	Pemberton	Say
Markoe	Pennell	
Matlack	Phile	Turnbull
▲ Muhlenberg	Plumsted	Truxton
McFadden		Taylor
McCalla	Ralston	
Mickle	Randolph	Valentine
	Rush	Vaughan
Nelson	Robins	
Nixon	Russell	Willing
Naglee	Rundel	Wainwright
Nice	Randolph	Warner
	Rutter	Wood
Ogden		Wilkinson
	Scott	White
Penrose	Sewell	Williams
Peters	Sellers	Wharton
Price	Shippen	Welsh
Purviance	Stokes	

Of the two books referred to in the beginning of this paper, I first read the life of Esther Reed, but did not find therein the names of the contributors; in a search for these, I communicated with the librarians of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and of the Congressional Library at Washington, but without success. I feared that I would not be able to find the lists; but, on a recent visit to Pittsburgh, I discovered the other book, and therein my quest was rewarded. I am indebted to Miss Leach for valuable counsel, and for verifying much of the information contained in this brief sketch of the Emergency Aid of 1776, which I trust will be interesting to my co-workers in the like movement in which we are now engaged.

ANNE VON MOSCHZISKER.

November, 1917.

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